

FOOD SECURITY PROJECT

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Within the last year in Palm Beach County,
1 in 3 households with incomes less than or equal to \$35,000
ran out of food before they had money to buy more.

Lack of income, low-paying jobs, high utility bills,
transportation problems and disabilities
were named as the top reasons.

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Members of the Hunger Coalition saw the need for the Food Security Project due to five years of first-hand knowledge regarding food resources and food needs in Palm Beach County. While anecdotal evidence of hunger and a lack of proper nutrition were witnessed at the consumer level, there was no recent, accurate data regarding hunger and food insecurity in Palm Beach County that would support strategic planning for food systems.

Once funding was secured for the research project, an 18-month strategy was established to collect qualitative and quantitative information about food security and insecurity, and to organize partners to develop and implement a strategic plan. The overall project design for the Food Security Project was divided into three segments:

Phase I is structured to use the USDA's U.S. Household Food Security Survey (HFSS) in a door-to-door survey to find out more about household food security in areas with a median income of \$35,000 or less.

Phase II is structured to complete more qualitative research about the households that are food insecure with and without hunger.

Phase III is structured to allow community partners to participate in the strategic planning and implementation process that will include both a proactive long-term strategy and a short-term reactive strategy to address the needs of the community.

The HFSS measures food security, and food insecurity with and without hunger throughout the nation. Specifically, the survey measures a household's financial ability or constraints in obtaining enough food for the entire year. Nationwide, one-third of the hunger measured is

occasional, occurring only one or two months of the year. Two thirds is recurring, experienced in three or more months of the year.

Previous Research

In February 2004, an analysis of the 2000, 2001, and 2002 *Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement* (CPS-FSS) for Palm Beach County was completed by Mark Nord of the USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) and determined the following for **all** Palm Beach County households: 89.1% Food Secure, 10.9% Food Insecure, and 1.6% were food insecure with hunger. The margin of error (90% confidence limits) for food insecurity is plus or minus 2.9% in that study. The data was collected over three years via telephone surveys from a sample of 162 different households each year. The Food Security Project Steering Committee chose to follow-up the existing research from the CPS-FSS administered annually by the U.S. Census Bureau with a more detailed assessment of the sub-population with a greater likelihood of food insecurity.

Methodology and Sample Design

Using the CPS-FSS data as a baseline, Robert Duncan, Ph.D and Gabriel Cardenas, MPH at the University of Miami, School of Medicine, Department of Epidemiology and Public Health provided the sample design, data analysis, and overall guidance for the Palm Beach County Food Security Survey.

USDA U.S. Household Food-Security/Hunger Survey 18 Question Module used in the CPS-FSS survey along with demographic questions, was uploaded into handheld computers for use in the door-to-door survey. Sixty-nine census block groups that reported a median household income of \$35,000 or less in the U.S. Census 2000 were selected for the sample.

PROFILE OF THE SAMPLE

Median household income determined the census block groups that were selected for the sample. Block groups were examined for homogenous and non-homogenous dwellings, and were surveyed accordingly. Two hundred and forty-seven interviews were conducted in 44 of the 69 census block groups that were selected. For Palm Beach County, \$35,000 is about 190% of the poverty level for a family of four. During Phase II, follow-up interviews were conducted via the telephone with 18 food insecure with and without hunger households. Households who were interviewed during Phase II agreed to participate in follow-up interviews during Phase I, and were selected by ethnicity, race and geographic area to represent the survey sample.

Demographics of 247 Door-to-Door Survey Respondents								
Food Security Levels	Race		Ethnicity		Age	Education		
156 Food Secure	40%	Black/ African-American	30%	Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish	<i>Includes ages of all people sharing the household food resources.</i>	15%	8th Grade or Less	
45 Food Insecure without Hunger	40%	White	<i>Of those who self- identified as Hispanic, Latino or Spanish</i>			23%	Some High School	
46 Food Insecure with Hunger	1%	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	27%	Mexican		28%	High School Graduate or GED	
	1%	Asian/ Pacific Islander	15%	Puerto Rican	12%	<1 to 5 yrs.	18%	Some College or Technical School
	18%	Other	12%	Cuban	27%	6–17 yrs.	4%	Trade School or Apprentice
			46%	Other	11%	18–59 yrs.	9%	College Degree
					2%	60–84 yrs.	3%	Graduate work +
						85 + yrs.		

KEY FINDINGS

According to the HFSS, "When food insecurity with hunger occurs in the United States, it is, in most cases occasional or episodic, not chronic. The food security measurement approach used in this report is designed to register occasional or episodic occurrences." It is important to keep in mind that the statistics represented are not daily statistics, and that factors that affect the households financial security may fluctuate throughout the year.

Comparison of Food Security Levels of Households in Lower Income Areas			
	Description	US Households *	Palm Beach County Households**
Food Secure	In the last 12 months, the household had <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access at all times, to enough food for an active healthy life for all household members 	70.8%	63.2%
Food Insecure Without Hunger	At a minimum in the last 12 months the household: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> worried whether their food would run out before they got money to buy more AND the food they bought just didn't last and they did not have money to buy more AND they could not afford balanced meals 	19.5%	18.2%
Food Insecure with Hunger	In addition to reporting all of the conditions above the respondent reported: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> one or more adults ate less than they felt they should AND adults in the household cut the size of meals or skipped meals in 3 or more months. 	9.7%	18.6%
TOTAL		100%	100%

* US Households with income at or below 185% of Poverty Level (\$35,000 for a family of four) based on data from Households Food Security in the United States, 2002 (HFSS 2002) (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr35>)

** Palm Beach County Households in US Census Block Groups with a median income of \$35,000 or less.

Insufficient funds is the primary reason that Palm Beach County households are food insecure with and without hunger. The number of households that are food insecure with hunger in Palm Beach County is almost double the national average of households with the same income levels. Food costs are considered a part of a household's discretionary spending even though food is a necessity. After calculating fixed costs such as health insurance, rent, utilities, child care and transportation, there are very few if any discretionary dollars left for low-income households to spend on food.

In follow-up interviews, respondents said that lack of income, low-paying jobs, high utility bills, transportation problems, and disabilities, were the reasons that they did not have enough money for food. While the minimum wage has remained at \$5.15 per hour, Palm Beach County households have experienced an 80% increase in housing costs over the past five years, and a recent dramatic spike in fuel costs which raised the price for electricity, food, and transportation. (Census 2000, Department of Housing and Urban Development, FP&L).

In general, respondents desired better paying jobs or additional hours at their current job to earn more money and achieve financial independence. According to MyFlorida.com Labor Market Statistics, the highest increase in jobs in Palm Beach County from June 2003 to June 2004 appeared in: employment services (9%), general merchandise retail trade (7.7%), and food services and drinking places (5.4%). The median hourly wage for a job in retail sales is \$9.66 and the food preparation and serving industry is \$6.94. To afford a one-bedroom home in Palm Beach County an employee must earn \$12.79 per hour at a 40-hour work week, \$15.83 for a two-bedroom home and \$21.00 for a three-bedroom home (National Low Income Housing Coalition).

CHILDREN

According to the HFSS 2002, children are typically shielded from hunger even when resources are inadequate to provide food for the entire family. **However, in the US Census Block Groups in Palm Beach County that were surveyed, Food Insecurity with Hunger Among Children is three times the national average for the same income levels.** The Food Security Project surveyed 128 households with children during the door-to-door survey. Of these households, 9.4% responded that their children skipped meals in three or more months. The survey also reported that 20.3% of these households cut the size of the children's meals because there wasn't enough money for food, and in 5.5% of the households, children did not eat for an entire day.

Comparison of Levels of Food Insecurity with Hunger among Children in Lower Income Areas			
	Description	US Households*	Palm Beach County Households**
<p>Food Insecure with Hunger among Children</p> <p>This classification is determined by the answers to the final eight questions asked only to households with children.</p>	<p>At a minimum these households reported that ALL of the following conditions had occurred sometimes or often during the previous 12 months:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A child was hungry, but they could not afford enough food. • They relied on a few kinds of low-cost food to feed the children because they were running out of money to buy food. • They cut the size of a child's meal because there was not enough money for food. • They could not afford to feed the children a balanced meal. • The children were not eating enough because they just could not afford enough food. 	<p>1.7%</p>	<p>5.7%</p>

* US Households with income at or below 185% of poverty level (\$35,000 for a family of four) based on data from the Household Food Security Survey in the United States 2002 (HFSS 2002). (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr35>)

** Palm Beach County Households in US Census Block with a median income of \$35,000 or less.

All food insecure households interviewed in Phase II were aware of the Food Stamp Program, but only 33% were active participants. There were various reasons that households did not participate in the Food Stamp Program including ineligibility due to income level and low benefit amounts. Although few respondents reported that they relied on federal programs to supplement their food resources, participation in Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Summer Lunch, and Reduced Fare and Free School Lunch are high. According to the HFSS 2002, at the national level, about 60% of households with incomes at 100% of poverty level or less are food secure. Some researchers speculate that these households are food secure due to their participation in federal food support programs.

During the 2003 school year, 71,059 Palm Beach County students qualified for Reduced Fare and Free School Lunch. And by June 2004, WIC was at an all time high with 22,176 active caseloads. The number of children in Palm Beach County that rely on federal food programs each day is on the rise, while the budgets for these programs are in jeopardy of being decreased.

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SENIORS

The HFSS measures a household's financial ability to obtain enough food to lead a healthy active lifestyle. Due to specific diet guidelines and physical limitations, elders often have unique needs when it comes to achieving food security. A precondition of food security is having and maintaining adequate income or resources for food. Therefore, not all of the reasons why a senior might be food insecure is captured by this survey. Seniors are affected by the same increases in rent, healthcare, food and fuel as other households, while their retirement incomes usually remain the same or decline over time.

Of the 247 households that were interviewed, 29% included a senior as a household member, and six percent consisted of seniors who lived alone. Of the seniors who lived alone and were determined food insecure with and without hunger; 85% have a disability, 85% said they did not have enough money for food, and 42% said it was too difficult to get to the store.

Unlike the child related questions in the survey, there are no questions that specifically address the food security of the seniors within the household. Additional follow-up interviews were added to Phase II to collect information about seniors.

Individual open-ended interviews were completed with two separate groups of seniors. The first group consisted of seniors who were participating in the home delivered meals program and the second consisted of active seniors living in a senior community. In the group that were receiving home delivered meals, 75% could prepare their own meals, but only 25% could do their own grocery shopping. For the active seniors, 12.5% said they had problems with obtaining enough food because they did not have enough money, and used Food Stamps and community programs to supplement the household food resources.

According to the report by the Department of Elder Affairs, State of Florida, *Assessing the Needs of Elder Floridians, 2004*, "About 90 percent of Florida elders are able to get all of the food they need." Financial, health and inability to prepare food are the reasons cited that seniors may not have enough food. Community food resource programs in Palm Beach County address the seniors' needs and maintain their food security. For calendar year 2003, Area Agency on Aging funded 305,000 congregate meals and 417,000 home-delivered meals to Palm Beach County seniors.

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND SOLUTIONS

As proposed in the funding request and stated in the overall plan for the Food Security Project, Phase III, strategic planning will begin on October 14, 2004. Organizations that supported the Food Security Project have committed to using the results of the survey to implement collaborative programs and systemic changes to increase household food security and healthy initiatives for the residents of Palm Beach County.

As Dr. Jean Malecki, Director of the Palm Beach County Health Department stated at the kick-off of the Food Security Project, "The long-term effects of malnutrition are devastating. People face any number of problems including a weak immune system, stunted growth and a shorter life expectancy. I look forward to the results of this survey so we can best direct our efforts toward curtailing this problem."

Adding the health risks of food insecurity with and without hunger to the financial instability that many Palm Beach County households face, the outcomes can cause extreme consequences for the future productivity of this county.

The strategic planning session will address issues raised from the Food Security Project, working on both long-term and immediate plans to address food insecurity and hunger. Community partners, government agencies, corporations, and food resource consumers will be able to participate in the solution planning process. A forum for public comment and opinion will be convened following the strategic planning process.